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AUTHOR Savangvarorose, Bang-Orn
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ABSTRACT

Results of a 1982-1983 survey of the Thai business community concerning its needs for English language skills and of a survey of the course offerings at Thai colleges and universities are reported and discussed. The industry survey targeted 60 of the 600 largest Thai companies in manufacturing, trading, finance, hotels and health care. The university survey focused on the business English offerings of four state universities, two private universities, and two private colleges. The reported amount and importance of English language use in general and of five language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation) within the universities and in the foreign dealings of the companies surveyed is tabulated. The offerings, enrollment, methods, and materials used in business English instruction in the higher education institutions are reported, and their relevance and value are estimated, based in part on results of a survey of graduates. (MSE)

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BUSINESS ENGLISH IN THAILAND: THE NEEDS OF THE THAI BUSINESS COMMUNITY, AND COURSES TAUGHT AT THE THAI UNIVERSITY

By

Mrs. Bang-Orn Savangvarorose

Chulalongkorn University

Bangkok, Thailand

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BUSINESS ENGLISH IN THAILAND : THE NEEDS OF THE THAI BUSINESS COMMUNITY, AND COURSES TAUGHT AT THE THAI UNIVERSITY.

INTRODUCTION.

During the last two decades, Thailand has tried to introduce improvements in society in general and the economic sphere in particular. The ultimate goal of the present Thai government is to develop the country to the point where it will become at least semi-industrialized by the end of the Fifth Development Plan in 1986. In order to achieve this goal, the government has encouraged investment by foreign countries, especially the United States and Japan. Moreover, the government has also promoted the export of Thai merchandise. Thailand has done and continues to do business with more than 100 countries all over the world. (Information courtesy of the Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce). Thus, the essential medium for business communication is certainly English or more specifically business English. Business English is becoming increasingly important in Thailand because it has an important part to play in helping the country to achieve its ultimate goal, that is to sucessfully boost its economy and improve the overall quality of life in society and to take its place among the industrialized nations.

The purpose of this presentation is to report the results of the survey of: (1) sixty out of the 600 biggest Thai companies comprising manufacturing companies, trading companies, financial institutions, hotels and private hospitals; (2) Business English curricula and courses of 4 state universities, namely: Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Kasetsart, Srinakarinwirot, and 2 private universities, namely; the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Bangkok University, and 2 private colleges, namely: Assumption Business Administration College and Kirk College. The survey was carried out between 1982-1983.

The procedures adopted were as further. Data were collected by means of 3 sets of questionnaire sent to the personnel of business companies. Interviews were also conducted. In order to collect data from state and private universities and private colleges, the questionnaire, the curricula and the interviews were used. The presentation is divided into 3 parts:

I. The Needs of the Thai Business Community.

II. The Courses Taught at the Thai Universities.

III. An Evaluation of the Courses.

I. THE NEEDS OF THE THAI BUSINESS COMMUNITY.

Sixty companies were selected at random from a piece of research entitled "600 Biggest Companies in Thailand" conducted by a group of lecturers from the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy at Thammasat University between 1977-1980.

The results of the survey presented in table form together with explanation are as follows:

Table 1. The Importance of Business English in 60 of the Biggest Companies in Thailand

No.of the Companies	Degree of Importance: Highest 5	High 4	Moderate 3	little 2	not at all 1	Total
Manufacturing Co.(16)	2	6	3	5	-	16
Trading Co. (21)	3	11	7	-	-	21
Financial Institutions (18)	4	3	6	5	-	18
Hotels (3)	1	2	-	-	-	3
Private Hospitals(2)	1	-	1	-	-	2
Total	11 (18.333%)	22 (36.666%)	17 (30%)	10 (16.666%)	-	60

The mean is 3.516. This indicates that Business English is very important to Thai business companies.

The use of English was found to be most prevalent among managers and managers of divisions. In descending order; managers, managers of divisions, assistants to managers, secretaries, typists, personnel in foreign divisions, and heads of sections used English to a correspondingly lesser degree in their daily work. Even the personnel of the foreign division, however, considered they use English for a little over half their work.

Fifty-three companies use English to communicate with foreign companies to a considerable degree. However, 37 companies out of 60 use English within their companies because they want to maintain the same standard as international companies. Another reason for using English is that chiefs of divisions are foreigners.

Table 2. Degree of Using 5 Skills of Business Companies

Skills	No.	Highest	High	Moderate	Little	Not at all	$\bar{x}$
Listening	60	16	10	17	9	8	3.283
Speaking	60	14	16	14	12	4	3.400
Reading	60	13	17	19	9	2	3.500
Writing	60	18	18	10	13	1	3.650
Translation	60	8	6	13	14	9	2.500

From Table 2, it can be seen that Thai Business Companies use written English to a considerable degree. On the other hand, they use listening, speaking and reading skills to a moderate degree and translation only a little.

Table 3. The Requirements of Executives Re: the Linguistic Ability of their Personnel.

Executives of	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Translation
Manufacturing Co.	good	good	good	good	little
Trading Co.	good	good	fairly good	*Excell-ent	fairly good
Financial Institutions	good	fairly good	good	good	fairly good
Hotels	*Excell-ent	*Excell-ent	good	fairly good	fairly good
Private Hospitals	good	*Excell-ent	good	little	least

From Table 3, it can be seen that the executives of hotels required a high degree of proficiency in listening and speaking skills of their personnel while the executives of private hospitals required a high level of oral ability only. However, executives of trading companies required a very high standard terms of writing. Executives of private hospitals had least need for translation skill.

The Five Skills: Their Relative Importance and Use.

The questionnaire was sent to 94 Managers of Divisions in 60 companies to find out the extent to which each skill was used and the purposes for which they were needed. The results are as follows:

Listening Comprehension.

Clearly, listening is fairly important to businessmen since they frequently have to deal directly with their counterparts and foreign customers. Sixty-seven percent of those interviewed needed listening skills for telephone conversations. The topics include business transactions and general conversation; the language used, that of discussion.

Oral Skills.

Oral skills are also used to some degree by businessmen. This oral communication mainly takes the form of discussions, but also serves a general conversational purpose. Another purpose of less importance is to give information concerning their merchandise and describe their products. Thai businessmen have to use English when speaking to their foreign counterparts and their customers, but rarely use it to their colleagues and employees.

Reading Skills.

Reading comprehension skills are also fairly important to Thai businessmen. To a certain degree, they are required to read material concerning the day-to-day running of their business, such as business letters, telexes, telegrams, business journals, administrative orders, instructional manuals and various kinds of reports. The main purpose of their reading is to comprehend the material then draft a reply. Another equally important purpose is to extend their knowledge of this particular field of business. They rarely read in order to criticize and analyze.

Writing Skills.

Writing is also essential. The various forms of written communication arranged in descending order of importance are: first telexes and letters of request and inquiry, then memos, telegrams and records of all sorts. The kinds of letters most rarely used are those involving Claims, Adjustments and Sales.

Those to whom they write are mostly their customers and to a lesser degree their employers.

Translation.

Translation is of so little importance that is not worth mentioning in a business context.

With regard to those personnel in business companies who use English in their daily work, 75% of them completed their education in Thailand, whereas 16.1% graduated from the United States. Forty-seven percent had got a Bachelor's degree, while 24% had only got diplomas in Business Studies. However, 15% had got a Master's degree. While working, they apply what they have studied and what they have learned through self-study together with their experience. The problems that they have in using Business English are mainly concerned with their speaking and listening skills, and only to a lesser degree with writing. They have the least problem with reading. Ninety percent of those who have problems solve them by reading textbooks while 65.2% study from their old texts that they have studied at school or university. However, the personnel of the companies surveyed would like to see a vast improvement in their speaking and listening abilities, but they see less of a need to improve other skills.

Conclusion.

Business English: A Comparative Table of: The Extent of its Use, Standards Required by Employers, Problems Encountered, Personnel Need for Improvement.

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Translation
Use	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	*Great	Little
Standard Required by Employers	Good	Good	Good	Good	Fairly good
Problems Encountered	Moderate	Moderate	Little	Moderate	Little
Personnel Need for Improvement	*Great	*Great	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

In conclusion, writing is used to a great degree in Thai Business Community, but the users really need to improve their listening and speaking skills. However, the executives of business companies want their personnel to be well versed in all the four skills, namely, listening, speaking reading and writing.

II. THE COURSES TAUGHT AT THAI UNIVERSITIES.

1. State Universities.

In Thailand there are 13 state universities of which 2 are open, and 3 are situated in the provinces. Only 5 state universities in the capital offer business English courses and it was 4 out of these 5 which were surveyed. They are (1) Chulalongkorn University (CU), (2) Thammasat University (TU), (3) Kasetsart University (KU) and (4) Srinakharinwirote University - Prasarnmitr (SWU). The findings are as follows.

1.1 The Commencement of Business English Courses at 4 State Universities, CU, TU, KU and SWU.

Two out of the four universities KU and TU started business courses in 1976 and 1977 respectively whereas the other two CU and SWU began theirs in the same year-1980.

1.2 Credits Allotted.

The credits allotted range from 1 to 3.

1.3 Status of Course.

Only one state university, CU has compulsory Business English courses for Commerce students; two of the others, TU and KU offer them as elective courses open to all students, SWU offers a course for teachers of Business Education.

Only two universities out of four, CU and TU have intensive business English courses.

1.4 Skills Offered.

Only CU offers speaking and writing as two separate skills; of the other three universities, TU has only one writing course whereas KU offers all the skills in one integrated course and SWU has two writing courses.

1.5 The Nomenclature of Business English Courses.

The courses go by different names: Business Writing, Writing English for Specific Communication, Technical English for Economics Students, Business Communication and English for Commercial Purpose.

1.6 Materials Used.

Two of the State Universities, CU and TU have written their own materials while the other two use overseas textbooks without adaptation.

1.7 The Enrollment.

Only CU which requires Commerce students to take Business English, has about 450 students registering for a course each semester. At the other three universities, TU, KU and SWU,there are about 15-70 students per course each semester.

1.8 Teaching Method (s).

Both situational and functional approaches are applied in teaching Business courses in the 4 state universities.

1.9 The Curricula.

The curricula were drawn up by foreign experts. The administrators and instructors also make use of overseas textbooks and feedback from Thai businessmen in determining the contents of courses.

2. Private universities and colleges.

Two private universities, namely the university of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (UTCC) and Bangkok University (BU), and 2 private UTCC colleges namely Assumption Business Administration College (ABAC) and Kirk College (KC) were surveyed. The findings are as follows:

2.1 The Commencement of Business English courses at 4 private institutions.

The University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (UTCC) first offered Business English courses in 1965, and now it offers a total of 32. This includes as many as 13 foundation Business English courses more than those of other universities and colleges in Thailand.

2.2 Credits Allotted.

The credits allotted are 3 for every Business English course of private institutions.

2.3 Status of Course.

Business English is compulsory in 3 of the 4 private institutions surveyed. In those private institutions, UTCC, BU and ABAC Business English is compulsory for students of Economics, and Business Administration as well as Secretarial and Humanities.

2.4 Skills Offered.

UTCC offers 5 separate skills namely, listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. The other three offer only writing skills.

2.5 The Nomenclature of Business English Courses.

The names are different. BU, ABAC and KC name their courses: Business English I, II, III and IV. UTCC calls Business Communication I, II and Communicative Writing I, II and also Business English I and II..

2.6 Materials Used.

Four private institutions use various overseas textbooks together with their own written materials. ABAC uses one book only entitled "Writing and Communication in Business" by J. Harold Janis as textbook in class for four Business English courses.

2.7 Enrollment.

Thirty to seventy five students attend each course per semester.

2.8 Teaching Method (s).

Instructors use situational and functional approaches in teaching Business English.

2.9 The Curricula.

The curricula were determined by foreign experts and Thai businessmen. The administrators also considered overseas curricula and text-books including authentic correspondence in forming their own curricula.

III. EVALUATION OF THE COURSES TAUGHT

The Relevancy of the Skills Taught at Thai Universities to the Needs of the Thai Business Community.

1. When comparing the needs of the Thai Business Community with the skills taught at the Thai Universities, the results are as follows.

1.1 Business English Writing as taught at CU (state) and TU (state) is relevant to the needs of the Thai Business Community for proficiency in writing skills.

1.2 KU (state) has a Business English course in which integrated skills are taught. The course, however, does not serve the needs of the Thai Business Community owing to constraints on teaching time.

1.3 SWU (state) has Business English courses for teachers of Business Administration, Clearly, these do not directly serve the needs of the Thai Business Community.

1.4 UTCC (private) has a business English curriculum which is relevant to the needs of the Thai Business Community for all round proficiency in the 5 skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation.

1.5 BU (private) has a business curriculum and courses which are relevant to the needs for writing, listening, and speaking skills. But the speaking courses are for interoffice communication only; for those who will become secretaries.

1.6 As regards another private college, KC in the year the survey was carried out, 1982-1983, part-time lecturers were assigned responsibility for Business English courses. However, no students registered for those courses; and hence there is no information available for analysis.

2. When the contents of each course and the emphasis of the instructors on the topics are compared with the needs of the Thai Business Community, the findings are as follow.

2.1 Most business English writing courses are somewhat relevant to the need for writing skills.

2.2 Two business English writing courses of UTCC (private) Business English I and II are significantly relevant to the need for proficiency in writing skills of the Thai Business Community.

Table 5. A Comparison between the Degree of Writing Skills Used in the Thai Business Community and the Emphasis that Instructors Put on the Topics in the Courses: Business English I and II at UTCC (private)

Kinds of Writing Communications	*Degree of Use	Emphasis of Instructors
1. Telexes	3.299	4
2. Telegrams	2.588	4
3. Memos	2.588	5
4. Request and Inquiry Letters	2.588	5
5. Replies to Requests & Inquiries	2.495	5
6. Reports	2.485	2
7. Minutes	2.206	5
8. Ackowledgement of Orders	2.196	5
9. Orders	2.186	5
10. Agendas	2.072	5
11. Credit Letters	2.010	4
12. Letters Requesting Credit Information	1.979	3
13. Claim Letters	1.938	4
14. Letters of References giving Credit Information	1.927	2
15. Collection Letters	1.906	4

Kinds of Writing Communications	*Degree of Use	Emphasis of Instructors
16. Adjustment Letters	1.875	4
17. Granting the Adjustment	1.781	4
18. Refusal of Adjustment	1.763	4
19. Sales Letters	1.667	2

5 - 4.6 represents greatest degree

4.5 - 3.6 represents great degree

3.5 - 2.6 represents moderate degree

2.5 - 1.5 represents little degree

*Degree of use is measured in the questionnaire discussed in Part I of the paper.

The correlation between degree of use and the emphasis of instructors by using the Kendal Rank Correlation Coefficient is equal to -0.3815 being equal to .0078, which indicates that the correlation is significant at 0.01. It can therefore be said that the two courses in Business English of UTCC (private) are relevant to the use of the Thai Business Community.

The Survey of the Graduates

Ninety-three businessmen who graduated from the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy of Chulalongkorn University (CU-state) in 1980 and 1981 were surveyed in order to evaluate two business English courses (1) Social English and (2) Business Writing that they had studied.

The findings are as follows:

1. The graduates applied what they had studied from the courses to a very moderate degree only.

2. The courses are useful for their business career to a moderate degree.

3. As a whole, the graduates were more or less satisfied with what they had been taught except for the following:

3.1 Fifty-one percent of the graduates said that they had little practice in writing, and 30.11% felt they needed more practice.

3.2 Forty-three percent required the teaching of Report Writing and Letters of Application, which were not included in the curriculum in 1982 and 1983. Moreover, they required the teaching of business language in a concise, precise and correct manner.

3.3 They needed examples of letters from authentic sources which instructors were unable to provide.

3.4 They felt that writing and speaking classes should consist of less than 30 students. Generally, at CU (state) there are about 30 students per class because of the lack of experienced teaching staff.

3.5 A number of graduates reguired the teaching of technical terms which have not been taught.

4. As for the integrated course with an emphasis on spoken English, they required more speaking practice in business contexts and in particular they felt they needed to practice the giving of information.

Some Defects of Business English Writing Curricula

1. Almost all universities surveyed basically imitate foreign curricula and textbooks in determining the contents to be taught in Business English courses. The result is that students miss some topics for which the Thai Business Community had most need. Moreover, the emphasis on the contents taught are often irrelevant to their real needs. According to my survey of 8 institutes that offer Business English courses, only one private university offers business English Writing courses which are significantly relevant to the needs of the Thai Business Community as their needs have been defined in Part II.

2. English curricula in Thailand from the primary level to the university level do not facilitate competence in writing and speaking. Writing and speaking skills require sufficient practice and a sound knowledge of basics. But curricula in Thailand mainly emphasize reading. Therefore, the time allotted to writing and speaking is not sufficient for students to achieve the necessary competence.

Moreover, at university there is no connection between previous courses and Business English courses. Students do not have the appropriate basic skill to be prepared for English Business English courses. This, therefore, causes problems when they study Business English.

The problems in teaching Business English Communications.

1. Instructors.

1.1 As almost all instructors lack a background in business, they may sometimes have difficulty concerning technical terms and business contexts. Moreover, if they are new to Business English teaching, it takes time for them to prepare themselves for teaching and sometimes they may have no self-confidence.

1.2 As Thailand is a developing country, the ratio of instructors to students is extremely low. One instructor has approximately 30-50 students per one writing class. Because English is not our native language, it is hard for us to correct students' papers more than once a week.

2. Students.

They have problems in both speaking and writing communications.

2.1 In writing

2.1.1 The majority of students do not have good basic grounding in English writing skills; they can not even compose grammatically correct sentences. Before they study how to write good business English, and different forms of Business English Communications,

they should possess a sound basic knowledge of writing English, but unfortunately, the majority of them do not possess this competence. In particular, students of private universities or colleges where there is less competition have problems with almost every skill. Their English is below the standard that university students should possess.

2.1.2 Students have a limited store of vocabulary, especially technical terms. Another problem is that students tend to misuse a lot of words. This is due to their lack of practice and they may have suffered from improper methods of teaching vocabulary from the very beginning.

2.2 In speaking

2.2.1 Students have insufficient practice in speaking. The English curricula in Thailand do not emphize speaking. Moreover, students never have an opportunity to practise speaking outside the class.

2.2.2 As English is used as a foreign language in Thailand and students lack confidence in speaking, they refuse to speak even in class.

3. Materials.

3.1 It is difficult to get authentic materials as most of them are considered confidential. We still need more authentic materials to be used as stimulating examples.

3.2 We do not have enough text-books from overseas in the library to be used by students as references because most of them are expensive. Moreover, it is difficult for instructors to keep up with modern text-books because it takes time to order from overseas.

3.3 The textbooks in present use are hardly proper for students. Most textbooks from overseas are too difficult while those written by Thais are often too easy and thus fail to stimulate students' interest.

4. General Problems.

4.1 The time allotted in studying Business English in all skills does not facilitate students' competence. Even in a writing course, students do not have sufficient time to practise each topic so well that they are able to apply it effectively and efficiently.

4.2 In a class, students' abilities vary so widely that instructors are unable to cope with the contents in time. Instruction is more often than not behind schedule.

4.3 Students do not have enough motivation in class. One cause is that they are poor in English. They are easily discouraged by their inabilities and mistakes.

4.4 We still lack visual aids that will save instructors' time and energy, and at the same time stimulate students.